

# How bureaucracy appropriated political power

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**W**E often ask ourselves why India has been more successful in establishing civilian supremacy than Pakistan, although both countries inherited armies imbued with British traditions. The answer is: they inherited similar armies but not national liberation movements of the same quality. As a result, our civil society was unable to assert its supremacy over the army, which led to the army's autonomy.

The civil service usurped political power because of the political weakness of the Muslim League. But the army asserted its autonomy over matters relating to foreign policy. Its coup of 1958 was really secondary, carried out at the behest of the West Pakistani ruling class, which did not want East Pakistan to exercise power.

Pakistan started its national existence with great disadvantages, the greatest of which was the absence of a well-organized political party, steeled by prolonged struggle as a mass movement. It may be a good debating point to say that going to jail is not always necessary. Of course, it is not. One may achieve one's objective without that dramatic gesture. Struggle, no doubt, has meaning in terms of the objective it pursues. But, equally, it has a value in itself, imparting its own character to the objective, lending quality to the latter by virtue of the test it has itself faced and overcome. The man who struggles and sacrifices for freedom is already free, the course of struggle has already emancipated him long before formal independence.

The quality of the struggle determines the quality of independence in more concrete ways too. It changes the correlation of forces as it proceeds. But its very launching is itself a sign that the old correlation has begun to change. When the Indians started confronting the British Empire in 1919, the British appeared invincible and most of those who faced the police or went to prison did

my, already controlled by Hindus, did not grow fast enough to let the Muslims in.

As the crisis of the landed class deepened, and the Hindus kept blocking the entry of the Muslims into the capitalist sector, the latter began to think of a separate national market where they could form their own capitalist class. This urge was, however, the greatest in Bengal and in the provinces where the Muslims were in a minority. The Muslim-majority provinces of western India, which now form Pakistan, did not feel the need since their pre-capitalist societies had not yet reached a crisis, the cutting off of the irrigation canal system in the 19th century having enabled the landed class to reclaim a lot of new land which was sufficient for its needs.

The Muslim League thus represented primarily the nascent Muslim bourgeoisie of the provinces where the Muslims were in a minority and of Bengal. In the former, it was an alliance between the Muslim traders, industrialists and members of the liberal professions on one side and what Hamza Alavi calls the "salarial" (office workers) on the other. These latter were the off-spring of the landed class. They had lost or were fast losing their agrarian base. The masses were Hindu.

Bengal had a small Muslim trading bourgeoisie and a bigger "salarial". The two were aligned but were able to form an alliance with the peasantry only during the Second World War, when the Muslim League acquired a mass base. But it did not get the time to turn this base into a mass movement. The result was that Muslim nationalism of the minority provinces, which was a bourgeois movement without a mass base, and the Muslim Bengali nationalism of a "salarial" with mass support, cooperated in the Pakistan movement but never fused with it.

The masses in India's western agrarian were Muslim. However, their agrarian society being stable, they

Palestine. That would effectively have meant handing the country to the Congress, which dominated the interim government in Delhi. But, more important, the suggested movement may never have got off the ground. Organized agitation would have been doubtful.

The Muslims of the provinces on India's western fringe had voted in 1946, by and large, for the Muslim League but there was hardly a party organization there. The NWFP had managed to give a majority to the Congress in the provincial legislature, the Muslim League had gained a majority in the Sindh legislature because the traditional political class of landlords, whose lands were mortgaged to Hindu money-lenders, had gone over to it.

They would neither have liked to stir a popular agitation nor would they themselves have opposed the government. The Muslim League existed in Punjab with the permission of the landed class, organized as the Unionist Party, whose only worry was that there should be no land reforms there. Anyway, if the Muslim League had attempted a mass agitation against the government, the landed class and the carpet baggers would have abandoned it.

True, it would have retained its mass support and its bourgeois and petty bourgeois leaders and most of the party leaders of the minority provinces. But at least 20 years would have been required to forge this mass and leadership into an effective movement. Therefore, Azad's advice was unrealistic.

The problems, which could not have been dealt with in the short time available to the Muslim League between its demand for partition and its realization of that demand seven years later, all appeared as practical difficulties when independence was achieved. The ruling party began to cede political space to the civil bureaucracy, which was far better organized and cohesive. In fact, according to the scholar Ayesha Jalal, the government itself depended upon

their own strength.

Secondly, a mass struggle pursued over a period, shows the leaders what sacrifices the people are capable of for the ideals they believe in. The people on their side come to value and trust their leaders. They repose confidence in their ability to stand up for them. Tested in the heat of battle, their mutual bond becomes unbreakable.

Thirdly, a prolonged mass movement, in defiance of authority, already acquires some of the characteristics of government. In a general confrontation with the government, the movement's leadership has to provide for emergency measures like the operation of an ambulance service etc. It also has to make crucial decisions. It thus gains experience of governing in this process.

Finally, the sacrifices of the leaders and the workers of the movement and their demonstrated dedication to the cause give it a legitimacy, making these people the natural claimants to power when independence comes.

The Muslim League took power in Pakistan without having had the time, or even the possibility, to create and lead a mass movement over a period of time. Hence many of its disadvantages, its early abdication of power in favour of the bureaucracy and its early disintegration.

This requires a little historical background. Northern India was mainly under the Muslim rulers from about 1000 AD until the British displaced them in the 18th century. These kingdoms employed both Hindus and Muslims in their bureaucracy but the rulers, being Muslim, tended to favour their co-religionists, mainly from outside. Akbar recruited 70 per cent of his civil and military officers from Central Asia and Iran.

The state employees were paid in the form of revenues from the lands allotted to them, the lands themselves continuing to be the king's inalienable property. Since the number of Muslims in India was small, nearly the whole of the literati was sucked into state employment. When the British turned the land into private property, they became landlords. Thus, the Muslims ended, through a historical accident, as the owners of most of the land in northern India. This was true originally of Bengal as well until the British reversed the system and the land passed to the Hindu revenue officials.

The bulk of the Hindus being outside the system of land-ownership, their enterprising individuals took to trade, forming the bulk of the native bourgeoisie. When the British took over, this bourgeoisie was able to occupy nearly the whole space of India's trade industry, essentially as local partners of the British traders.

The basic difference between the economic bases of the two communities grew with time. While the business could grow, the total quantity of land was static and increasingly inadequate to meet the economic needs of its owners as they multiplied. The economic basis of the Muslim landed class was dissolving. Some children of the landlords were able to find jobs as white-collar workers. The rest faced pauperization, since the small capitalist sector of the Indian econo-

weakness of the Muslim League. But the army asserted its autonomy over matters relating to foreign policy. Its coup of 1958 was really secondary, carried out at the behest of the West Pakistani ruling class, which did not want East Pakistan to exercise power.

felt no need for a separate capitalist market. So the Muslim League hardly existed there right up to 1946.

The Indian Muslim bourgeoisie in the process of formation had originally hoped that cooperation would grow with the developed Hindu bourgeoisie. It joined the latter in 1921 in the struggle for independence. Once Gandhi betrayed that mass upsurge out of fear of its turning into a movement for social change, the two main communities of India fell apart. The Muslims floundered for the next 20 years, talking of a possible separation but not trying for it.

However, Gandhi's absolute refusal to discuss or even to acknowledge that the Muslim community could have any specific problems, persuaded the Muslims to opt for partition. Gandhi paid for his arrogance in 1942, when the Muslims refused to cooperate with the Congress in the Quit India Movement, enabling the British to crush it. Gandhi tried, after his release from prison in 1944, for a rapprochement but the Muslims did not trust him any more. It was, then that the Muslims chose partition under Jinnah, a bourgeois par excellence.

The settlement, that the Muslim League arrived at with the Congress at the end, gave Pakistan half of Bengal, half of Punjab, the district of Sylhet and the provinces of NWFP and Sindh. According to two reports, Abul Kalam Azad advised Liaquat Ali not to accept such a weak Pakistan but to insist upon the whole of Bengal, Punjab and Assam. He told him that the Muslim League should launch a mass movement to force both the British and the Congress to concede to this demand and it would succeed, as the British would not leave India to just one party. The Muslim League leadership did not accept the suggestion and rightly so.

Azad was asking the Muslim League to emulate the Congress, although the party lacking its mass base, its organization or its experience of mass agitation over three decades. His presumption that the British would not leave India to one party, derived from the idea of British fair play. However, we know from experience that, if they had been unable to get the Muslim League and the Congress to agree on a plan, they may have left India to the Congress or they may just have pulled out, as they did a year later in

minority provinces and was, therefore, "left behind" in India, so to say. True, it had acquired a mass character in Bengal but that had been a relatively recent phenomenon.

Moreover, the Bengalis were now tending to emphasize their distinctive Muslim Bengali nationalism. They rejected Urdu as the national language, although it had been assumed throughout the struggle for Pakistan that, since it was the language of the Indian Muslims, would be the national language of Pakistan. This rejection had greater implications than appeared at the time. M.A. Jinnah had flown to East Pakistan to tell the Bengali people that, "Without one state language, no nation can remain tied up solidly together and function... Therefore, so far as the state language is concerned, Pakistan's language shall be Urdu".

Advocates for Bengali did not counter that Bengali, being the language of the majority of the country, should be the only state language. Instead, they proposed two languages, essentially one for each wing, thus rejecting the principle of there being one state language for a nation. More important, by emphasizing the separateness of the two wings in this manner and perhaps their ultimate destiny to separate, the Bengali leadership weakened its claim, as the representative of the majority, to a leading role at the centre. This ceded further political space to the bureaucracy, which had a nation-wide structure.

The western wing had neither felt the need for Pakistan, nor really struggled for it. It had become a part of the new country as the result of a tripartite deal at the all-India level. Therefore, its political leadership was still attuned to the politics of the colonial period, where the natives had little political responsibility. It spoke primarily through the bureaucracy, civil and military.

The bureaucracy was not only wielding effective administrative power in the country. It was increasingly impatient with the government and asserting its desire to dictate political decisions also. For instance, political leadership, sensitive to public opinion, did not wish to send troops to participate in the Korean war, while the bureaucracy was in its favour, hoping thus to gain America's goodwill.

During the discussion in the cabinet on this question, Ghulam Mohammad, the then finance minister, with Chaudhry Mohammad Ali, for the West Pakistani bureaucracy in the higher echelons of the state, insisted that the government ignore the public sentiment and send troops to Korea. He, an unelected official, told Prime Minister Liaquat Ali "to govern or get out" and went on to liken the highest executive body of the state to "a stable with mules."

With time, the balance between the political leadership and the bureaucracy went on to change in the latter's favour specially after civil bureaucracy acquired the backing of the military, until Pakistan came under "the rule of the *daftaries*. They, in turn, yielded power to the military bureaucracy. ■